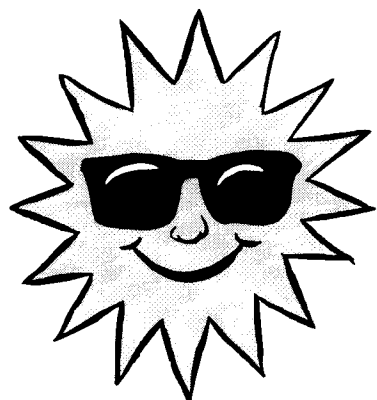


Department of Human Services

Prepared by the
DHS Office of
Communications
(517) 373-7394



*Important story at this spot

Articles in Today's Clips

Thursday, July 6, 2006

(Be sure to maximize your screen to read your clips)

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Leave partisanship out of reform debate

Thursday, July 06, 2006

Editor, The News:

As director of Saginaw-Midland-Bay Michigan Works, I must respond to Maria Kulick's June 26 letter regarding state Rep. Roger Kahn's position on welfare reform. We are the agency that implements the state's welfare reform work requirements, known as "Work First," on the local level.

I understand this is an election year, and some people may feel the need to attack candidates. But I have met with both Reps. Kahn and Carl Williams (along with the other elected officials from the Tri-Cities), and I believe they all understand the requirements for reform of Work First.

Work First has been a resounding success since its inception more than 10 years ago. From 1995 to 2005, the number of welfare recipients in Michigan fell 74 percent. During the tracking period from 1998 to 2002, employment accounted for 49.5 percent of the welfare cases closed in Michigan, the highest percentage of any state.

However, we need reforms to the Work First program for three reasons.

First, the federal government has instituted drastic increases in required work participation. Without major reform, the state is on track to achieve about half of the performance required. If the state does not meet the new requirements, Washington could impose \$100 million in penalties.

Second, we are at the point where a significant portion (but not a majority) of the welfare recipients referred to us by the state have decided they are just not going to cooperate. These are people who are able to work. Some have been referred to us more than 20 times. Sanctions are necessary to motivate them. Kulik states that sanctions don't work, but she does not know that. The sanctions now in place are routinely not enforced by the state.

Third, many welfare recipients referred to us have extremely difficult barriers to employment. Many are without a high school diplomas, many have extremely low reading and math skills, and many have no successful work experience.

Work First must be expanded to give Michigan Works! more flexibility in providing the training necessary to remove these barriers.

The Legislature is working hard on necessary reforms. Let's leave partisan politics out of it.

Ed Oberski,

director,

Saginaw-Midland-Bay Michigan Works!

Foster care save Sisters in good hands now, but all children owed more

FLINT JOURNAL EDITORIAL

FLINT

THE FLINT JOURNAL FIRST EDITION

Thursday, July 06, 2006

The news had a lot of us sighing in relief. Even as Family Court Judge Duncan M. Beagle was openly encouraging two Flint sisters to come in via a letter in The Flint Journal, caseworkers with the Department of Human Services were working to have the pair placed in the home of a family friend.

Natasha Sawyers, 16, and her sister, Ashley, 14, are living in a home on Flint's west side now, apparently happy and healthy despite what had to have been a stressful time hiding from authorities. The pair was featured in a June 4 Flint Journal story about foster care runaways in Genesee County.

However, in celebrating their returns, we must not forget other foster care children still on the run. They number more than 150 in Michigan, and every day they're not found puts them at risk for emotional and physical harm. It also deprives them of the safe childhoods and educations that are their right.

When youngsters are removed from their parents' custody, the state takes on the awesome responsibility of seeing to their care. That makes it imperative that caseworkers, foster parents, teachers, school officials and others do their jobs effectively.

That's not always happening, as Natasha Sawyers made clear in a poignant letter to The Journal last month. Natasha and Ashley were removed from their mother's care in late 2004, and authorities are investigating whether Ashley was abused in a foster home.

In her letter to The Journal, Natasha wrote: "It is 2006, and I'm getting sick of this. Why won't they (place) us somewhere where we are safe, comfortable and loved?"

Whatever the reason for their leaving foster care, the fact that it happened at all is unacceptable. While on the run, living with people who may not have had their best interests at heart, they missed months - in Natasha's case, nearly two years - of school.

The girls now have high hopes for a bright future and we wish them well. But as a society, we must ask: How can vulnerable children become law-abiding and self-supporting adults, when we do so poor a job of nurturing them?

DETROIT

DESIREE COOPER: Home for girls doesn't want help to end at 18

July 6, 2006

BY DESIREE COOPER
FREE PRESS COLUMNIST

Recently, there's been a hue and cry for somebody to do something to help young adults who are too old for the foster care system, but who still need support to get on their feet. There's no doubt that such a need exists, and the Free Press has even endorsed a proposal to establish a full-service, residential village to help ease their transition into the real world.

But the need touches children who are aging out of the juvenile justice system, as well. That's where Vista Maria comes in.

Increasing odds of success

Years ago, I had the good fortune to visit Vista Maria, a residential home for severely disturbed girls, ages 11 to 17. The 170 residents of the Dearborn Heights facility all have a history of abuse and neglect or deep emotional and mental health problems.

Vista Maria has been taking them in since 1883, cloistering them on a beautiful, 37-acre campus. Tiffeny Lang was 16 when she arrived at Vista Maria two years ago, a violent and incorrigible teen who'd been referred there by the juvenile court. After a year of treatment for her bipolar disorder, Lang, now 18, just graduated on the dean's list from Woodhaven High School.

But for so many other residents of Vista Maria, leaving the facility can be yet another trauma in their turbulent lives.

"We commonly hear from the girls, 'This has been great, but now what?' " said Cameron Hosner, president and chief executive. "It tears us up to have to let them go at 18."

Several years ago, Vista Maria's board began to nurture a new vision. The facility already has dorms, a school, and recreational and health care services. It also has community-based programs to prevent delinquency and after-care programs to help Vista Maria alumnae stay on track.

Why not expand the campus to embrace the needs of all marginalized women and girls?

"We already have such a great infrastructure," said Hosner. "We need to invest in restoring girls over the long haul. Why not create a Village of Hope?"

Inside the Village of Hope

The first phase of an all-encompassing Village of Hope will happen in eight months -- the opening of a charter school on Vista Maria's campus. The school, which Vista Maria hopes to run in conjunction with Ferris State University and Bay Mills Community College, will enable girls to continue to learn in a nurturing, supportive environment even if they no longer need residential treatment.

Older women from the community who want to return to school could also attend and take advantage of the envisioned day care services, the existing 12-step program and other support services.

"If something like that had been there when I was there, I would have stayed and graduated from Vista Maria," said Lang. "Many of the girls feel like an outcast in their regular public schools because no one has experienced the things we've experienced." Brandi King, 17, is one of those girls. She came to Vista Maria out of a foster home after being charged with shoplifting. Taken from her drug addicted mother at the age of 7, King had been a delinquent and a runaway almost ever since. She left Vista Maria in January after a nine-month stay, but she's had to struggle with getting back into school, and has a hard time coping with peers who aren't as interested in graduating. "Now I'm working on my GED," said King, who lives with her sister. "But I want to get back in and get a regular diploma."

A campus of continuing care

That's where the Village of Hope comes in. It will not be a lifelong crutch for the girls who age out of the program, but a much-needed continuum of support to help them make a successful transition.

According to a January report by the Michigan Taskforce on Youth Permanency and Transition, 47% of foster care youth experience homelessness within three years of aging out of the system. Within that time period, only 36% graduate from high school and 54% receive public assistance. Hosner believes girls who graduate from Vista Maria perform as poorly over time. What they need, he said, is more support.

"We can be a full-service center and the cost would be relatively inexpensive," said Hosner, who estimates the first phase, including a 500-student charter school, a day care/health care center and supported living programs on campus, would cost \$10 million. The 10-year plan that would include off-campus supported housing and an entrepreneurial training center, would be an additional \$10 million. "Clients would pay for our services on a sliding scale -- they need to feel like they're contributing to their own development. The program here will make them feel normalized, not broken." I have respect for the incredible job that Vista Maria does, serving some of the area's most troubled girls. But listening to Hosner talk about all of the support that his campus will provide for not only abused and neglected girls, but for marginalized women and their children, I worry that the agency is trying to take on the world. But Hosner, who is looking forward to an aggressive fund-raising campaign, is unfazed. "You're right, we can't save the world," he said. "But we can save our corner of it."

Contact DESIREE COOPER at 313-222-6625 or dcooper@freepress.com.

FOR MORE

- Vista Maria is located at 20651 W. Warren Ave. in Dearborn Heights. For more information, call 313-271-3050 ext. 182 or go to www.vistamaria.org.

The Detroit News

Thursday, July 06, 2006

Money maneuvers again give state balanced budget

Schools get deserved increases in spending outline

GOP lawmakers can claim some small victories in the agreement reached on the state budget.

They were able to hold spending below the rate of inflation and put more resources into education, which is the key to the state's future. Public schools will get an additional \$210 for each pupil, and the state's public universities and vital community colleges will receive increases that average 3 percent.

In addition, GOP members of the Legislature got the beginnings of a formula for public university funding. In previous years, college funding was a free-for-all in which those universities with the most powerful political patrons fared better than the others.

Now, there is some semblance of a system in which appropriation increases begin to match a school's mission, enrollment and performance in meeting, such goals as retaining students and producing technically qualified graduates.

And while the per-pupil increase for K-12 schools is welcome, as Linda Wacyk of the Michigan Association of School Administrators told The Detroit News, that increase will largely fund health care and retirement costs for public school employees rather than finding its way into the classroom.

And that brings us to the problem with the budget. Gov. Jennifer Granholm continues to resist major structural changes that will bring spending in-line with revenue for the long-term.

The Senate Fiscal Agency projects continuing General Fund revenues at \$8.4 billion. Legislative and executive branch budgeteers are making up the difference between that \$8.4 billion in revenues and a \$9.2 billion spending blueprint with a number of devices.

They're continuing a freeze of state revenue sharing payments to local governments and applying the roughly \$600 million savings to the General Fund, refinancing some state bonds, selling some land, anticipating some interest from the state's tobacco settlement and so on, for a number of one-time revenues.

To their credit, GOP lawmakers led by House Speaker Craig DeRoche fended off Granholm's attempt to hike taxes and fees by nearly \$100 million.

But they had to give in to the governor's insistence that **welfare payments be unlimited and the caseload allowed to grow unchecked.**

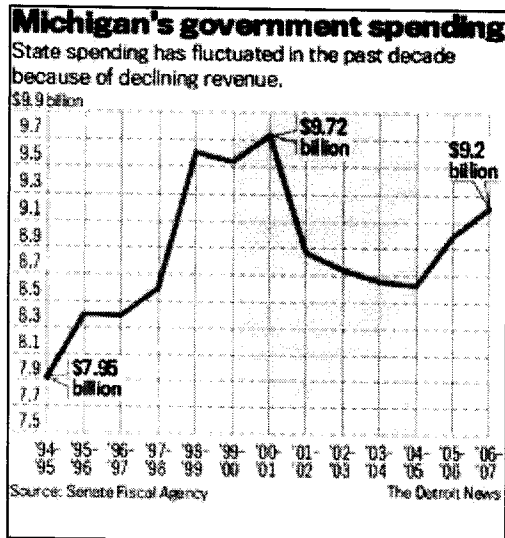
The money just isn't there to support such spending. Meaningful welfare reform would have put the state on a more responsible fiscal footing.

The Senate Fiscal Agency warns that if employment in nonmanufacturing sectors of the state's economy grows at its recent pace of not quite 1 percent per year, Michigan's

total employment won't return to the year 2000 level until 2016. That means tax revenues will continue to lag.

If the national economy slows, Michigan will be hurt all that much more. Either government's economic base will have to grow, or more spending cuts will have to take place.

There are hard choices ahead for whoever is in charge in Lansing next year.



DCH TAKES \$11M CUT, LEGISLATURE 2.7% INCREASE

MIRS, Wednesday, July 5, 2006

The agreed-upon budgets for the Department of Community Health (DCH) and the Department of Corrections (DOC) for Fiscal Year (FY) 2007 are the only two major budgets slated to be cut from the governor's recommendations under the tentative compromise reached between legislative and executive leaders last Thursday.

In total, nine budget are slated to receive the same General Fund amount Gov. Jennifer **GRANHOLM** recommended in her budget proposal last February, but most of the rest are slated to receive a little more, including the Legislature, which is getting its third straight increase, this one of 2.7 percent. The executive office is getting another 2.5 percent increase, presumably to keep up with the state employees' negotiated salary hikes.

Once again, throughout the process both the Legislature and the Executive proposed that neither branch should receive any increase in spending, only to tuck away a little for each body at the last minute during the closed-door "target" meetings.

In FY 2006, the Legislature gave itself a 3 percent raise (\$3 million more). In FY 2005, it was \$7.2 million more (See "Legislature Gives Itself \$3M Boost," 9/14/05).

The budget did not include cuts to the Michigan Tuition Grant Scholarship, across-the-board cuts or the closure of \$100 million in business tax "loopholes" the governor had suggested. Rather, budget officials were able to use \$110 million expected to be left over from this year's budget to balance next year's budget.

The '07 budget does not include increases in revenue sharing.

The "target" numbers for the \$9.222 billion (General Fund) FY 2007 budget shows DCH at \$2.940 billion (General Fund), \$61.7 million (2 percent) less than the governor's initial \$3.002 billion offering, but almost a half a percent (\$13.3 million) more than the House's proposal.

The cut in General Fund spending is \$11 million less than what DCH, the department in charge of the massive Medicaid health care program, received in FY 2006 and is around \$8 million less than the \$2.948 billion the Senate suggested for DCH in 2007.

It's unknown what, in particular, is being cut from the Medicaid budget to make up the difference, however the State Budget Office confirmed today that the target agreement specified that there would be no eligibility cuts.

The Department of Corrections (DOC) is only other major department to see a cut from the governor's proposal under the tentative agreement reached Thursday with the House, Senate and the governor's office. DOC will take a \$7 million less than the \$1.865 billion suggested in the governor's budget. The amount is still \$78 million more than the FY 2006 budget.

The Senate had agreed with the governor's recommended amount for FY 2007. The DOC ended up with \$30 million more than the House suggested.

Once again, after not recommending raises for either the Legislature or the Executive, the governor's office received a 2.5 percent increases from FY 2006 and the Legislature took a \$3.4

million increase, 2.7 percent more than the year before. It received \$124.67 million in FY 2006 and is slated to receive \$128.07 million in FY 2007.

The following is a breakdown of each department with the recommended target amount in General Fund spending only, how much General Fund money the department received in the governor's proposal, how much it received in FY 2006 and the percent increase (or decrease) from FY 2006:

- Agriculture, \$30,913,300 - \$30,06200 - \$28,362,000 — 9.0%
- Attorney General, \$32,896,000 - \$32,896,000 - \$31,501,000 — 4.4%
- Capital Outlay, \$2,200 - \$2,200 - \$4,401,000 — (-99.95%)
- Civil Rights, \$12,454,000 - \$12,454,000 - \$12,108,000 — 2.9%
- Civil Service, \$6,972,400 - 6,972,400 - \$7,102,400 — (-1.8%)
- Community Colleges, \$289,879,400 - \$289,124,000 - \$281,327,000 — 3%
- Community Health, \$2,940,082,700 - \$3,001,975,000 - \$2,951,899,000 — (-0.4%)
- Corrections, \$1,858,555,000 - \$1,865,555,000 - \$1780,650,000 — 4.3%
- Education, \$6,667,500 - \$6,667,500 - \$16,100,400 — (-58.6%)
- Environmental Quality, 33,828,400 - \$33,328,000 - \$31,809,000 — 6.3%
- Executive, \$5,509,900 - \$5,375,500 - \$5,375,500 — 2.5%
- Higher Education, \$1,624,791,300 - \$1,585,040 - \$1,577,443,000 — 3%
- History, Arts and Libraries, \$43,175,200 - \$42,800,000 - \$41,190,000 — 4.8%
- Human Services, \$1,197,467,900 - \$1,190,896,700 - \$1,082,196,400 — 10.65%
- Information Technology, \$0, \$0, \$0 — 0%
- Judiciary, \$160,604,800 - \$160,124,000 - \$157,614,000 — 1.9%
- Labor and Economic Growth, \$47,436,700 - \$47,436,700 - \$38,078,900 — 24.6%
- Legislature, \$128,072,700 - \$124,673,000 - \$124,673,000 — 2.7%
- Management and Budget, \$268,409,600 - \$273,409,000 - \$291,220,000 — (-8.5%)
- Military and Veterans Affairs, \$40,640,200 - \$40,640,200 - \$37,789,000 — 7.5%
- Natural Resources, \$25,269,600 - \$25,119,600 - \$25,593,200 — (-1.3%)
- School Aid, \$35,000,000 - \$35,000,000 - \$62,714,000 — (-44.2%)

- State, \$19,132,700 - \$19,132,700 - \$12,497,800 — 41.7%
- State Police, \$249,298,700 - \$255,298,700 - \$235,361,600 — 5.9%
- Transportation, \$0, \$0, \$0 — 0%
- Treasury, \$165,861,000 - \$170,867,000 - \$143,574,000 — (15.5%)

Here is the breakdown on the increases to the state universities:

- Grand Valley State - 6.0%
- Saginaw Valley State - 5.0%
- Lake Superior State, Oakland - 3.4%
- Michigan State, Northern Michigan, University of Michigan (Ann Arbor), University of Michigan (Flint) - 3.0%
- Central Michigan, Ferris State, University of Michigan (Dearborn), Western Michigan - 2.9%
- Eastern Michigan - 2.7%
- Wayne State, Michigan Tech - 2.5%

Yost will leave prison cell, return here Monday for bond hearing

Thursday, July 06, 2006

By CRYSTAL HARMON
BAY CITY TIMES WRITER

Convicted murderer Donna A. Yost will be returned to the Bay County Court Facility on Monday to request her freedom during an appeal.

Corrections officers will bring Yost from the Robert Scott Correctional Facility in Plymouth to Judge William J. Caprathe's courtroom for a 2:30 p.m. hearing.

A jury in March convicted Yost of felony murder in the Oct. 10, 1999, death of her 7-year-old daughter, Monique. The girl died in her Bay City home of an overdose of antidepressant medication. Caprathe in June imposed the mandatory sentence of life in prison without the possibility of parole.

But Yost's defense attorney, Edward M. Czuprynski, says there's "clear and convincing" evidence that, if freed on bond pending appeal, Yost would pose no danger to the community.

Czuprynski argues that Yost's appeal is based on substantial legal issues: Caprathe had a conflict of interest in overseeing the trial due to his earlier reinstatement of charges against Yost after another judge dismissed the charges, Czuprynski argues. He claims the judge improperly allowed certain testimony against Yost while restricting testimony and evidence that bolstered her defense.

Czuprynski also argues in the appeal that he provided ineffective assistance of counsel to Yost by not seeking Caprathe's dismissal from the case.

"Judge Caprathe will have an opportunity to show he can be fair and objective in the face of Donna Yost's claim that he denied her a fair trial," Czuprynski said.

Bay County Prosecutor Joseph K. Sheeran said his office will object to Donna's release on bail.

"She stands convicted of the most serious offense under the law," Sheeran said "She's been found guilty and I am aware of no issue of merit that would be raised under appeal."

Czuprynski lists several specific rulings in the trial that prevented Yost from a fair outcome, including the use by prosecutors of a photo of Monique's corpse during closing arguments.

- Crystal Harmon is a staff writer for The Times. She may be reached at 894-9643 or by e-mail at charmon@bc-times.com.

Teacher sex case seating a jury

Thursday, July 06, 2006

THE SAGINAW NEWS

Attorneys today were to start picking a jury for a former Buena Vista School District band instructor who faces charges of having sexual contact with six students.

Laura L. Findlay, 32, faces 22 counts of first-degree criminal sexual conduct with a person younger than 16. First-degree criminal sexual conduct involves penetration and is the most serious sexual offense.

Saginaw County Circuit Judge William A. Crane is presiding over the case.

Prosecutors have charged Findlay, who is in jail on a \$500,000 cash or surety bond, with having sex with boys from Ricker Middle School.

Six eighth-grade students -- ages 14 and 15 -- testified during preliminary hearings that Findlay engaged in oral sex with them and gave them lap dances.

Boys, who were band members, said the incidents occurred in the band room or in her sport utility vehicle behind Fort Saginaw Mall, at Holland and Outer Drive.

The Buena Vista Board of Education did not fire Findlay but laid her off as part of sweeping budget cuts.

Past felonies not held against 2 'good' staffers

BY STEPHANIE ANGELYN CASOLA
STAFF WRITER

Last week, the state's Department of Education released a list of 450 school employees who had been convicted of felony offenses. Two of those named are employed by Livonia Public Schools.

According to Supt. Randy Liepa, there is no cause for concern in the district.

The list for Livonia Public School employees included one maintenance worker and one teacher. The maintenance worker was convicted in 1993 for delivery or manufacturing drugs; the teacher was convicted in 1989 of false pretenses and in 1992 of installing an eavesdropping device.

Neither employee will face consequences in the district for their prior record. Liepa said he had no reason to believe the information should impact their jobs.

"They have good employee records with us," he said. "We have no reason to believe that won't continue."

The law was created to protect schools and day care facilities by preventing anyone with a history of criminal sexual conduct from working in those institutions. In February, the district received an initial list of names of employees who had misdemeanor or felony offenses under the School Safety Initiative. Neither list showed an individual with a record of criminal sexual conduct, which under the law would mean cause for immediate dismissal.

"The intent of the law is something that is understandable," said Liepa. "Certainly there are issues when we would not want people with certain backgrounds (in the district). That's understandable in regards to sex crimes."

It's quite different to have an employee who "paid their dues for something they did when they were young," he said.

In both cases, the crimes mentioned were committed more than 13 years ago.

"At the same point in time, we have to make sure we're employing people who are good to be working with students," said Liepa. A third name appeared on Livonia's list, but Liepa said it was sent in error and that record had been expunged.

As for the other two men, Liepa said, "we're very comfortable with who they are and what they do for us."

Originally published July 6, 2006

Kids Count should be taken to heart

It's up to our state leaders to take the critical next steps

Wednesday, July 05, 2006

As often seems to be the case, this year's Kids Count report offers bright spots amid gloom when it comes to the health and well-being of children in our community, our state and around the country.

Perhaps the most significant outcome of the annual study is that it keeps the issues affecting children front and center in the minds of the public and, most importantly, legislators and policymakers - no matter their town or district.

So, what is the good news? Overall, fewer teens are dying or getting pregnant. As a state, Michigan is in the middle of the pack in child well-being, ranking 27th. This means we should strive to do much better, but we've also made progress.

According to Priority Children, the child advocacy group that provides the report, Michigan has improved when it comes to school dropout rates, teen births, child deaths, teen deaths, children living in single-parent families and the number of idle teens.

Unfortunately, we're not doing so well when it comes to the number of babies dying before their first birthday. In addition to the infant mortality rate, poverty is on the rise. The number of Michigan youngsters living in poor homes jumped 29 percent, an ominous sign since child advocates note poverty goes hand-in-hand with a lot of the negative outcomes on which we've begun to show improvement.

Staying the course requires commitment to the programs already available and possibly the implementation of new ones. That's why this annual report along with its telling numbers is so important. Factors that threaten the health and safety of children need to be studied carefully and discussed fully by the folks who make the rules and hold the purse strings locally, in Lansing and in Washington. Without that occurring, the youngest and the most vulnerable among us risk being forgotten.

The Flint Journal

Published July 6, 2006

Police arrest man whose wife lost limb

Authorities say woman's severed arm was torn off

By Amber Hunt
Special to the Lansing State Journal

A Romulus man whose wife mysteriously lost an arm early Sunday is expected to be arraigned today on charges including drunken driving causing serious injury, police said.

Stephen Humphrey, 39, was arrested Wednesday and is now in the Monroe County Jail.

His wife, 34-year-old Brenda Humphrey, arrived at St. Joseph Mercy Hospital in Superior Township missing her right arm.

Brenda Humphrey was upgraded to fair condition Wednesday.

Police have searched for days for both the crime scene and the missing arm but have found neither.

The severing of her arm was not clean, as would be the result of a knife or hatchet wound, but rather appeared to have been torn off, police said.

She and her husband initially told police that they were driving away from a bar in Milan when Brenda Humphrey had to make a stop.

Her husband let her out of the car and drove up the road, they reportedly told police. When Stephen Humphrey returned, he said he found his wife lying in a ditch, missing an arm.

She told police that another car had hit her.

"From the get go, that's not a story we believed," said Monroe County Sheriff Lt. Dale Malone, who's based in Bedford.

When the two were interviewed separately, their stories didn't match, Malone said. Police believe Stephen Humphrey could be facing domestic violence charges as well.

Stephen Humphrey's vehicle was impounded, and Malone said there is evidence that the vehicle was involved in a crash.

A sample of Humphrey's blood is being analyzed by the Michigan State Police crime lab to determine its alcohol content.

The Associated Press contributed to this report. Contact Amber Hunt of the Detroit Free Press at (313) 222-2708 or alhunt@freepress.com.

Published July 6, 2006

4 admit defrauding elderly woman Couples schemed \$200,000 from woman with dementia

By Kevin Grasha
Lansing State Journal

GRAND RAPIDS - An Ovid couple who once operated a Lansing adult foster care facility pleaded guilty last week to defrauding an elderly resident out of as much as \$200,000.

In a plea agreement, Jeanne Miller, 40, and Charles Miller, 56, admitted to taking advantage of Phoebe Carol Ann Shull, who prosecutors said was diagnosed with severe dementia.

The former owners of Britten Manor - Kenneth Goff, 64, and his wife, Dolores Goff, 67, both of Harrison - also pleaded guilty to involvement in the scheme.

All are free on bond. They are scheduled to be sentenced on Oct. 16. The Millers face a maximum of 10 years in prison; the Goffs, who are Jeanne Miller's parents, face up to five years in prison.

They also will be ordered to repay the money they stole, said Assistant U.S. Attorney Hagen Frank, who prosecuted the case in federal court. He added that he intends to pursue more cases where people prey on the elderly.

"Anyone who thinks their only problem might be with the state is making a mistake," he said. Shull died in February 2005 at the age of 73. A year and a half earlier, according to court documents, long-time residents of Shull's Lansing neighborhood placed her in Britten Manor after noticing that her memory and ability to care for herself had become progressively worse. By August 2004, her condition had deteriorated so badly that she had little or no short-term memory, court documents showed.

In July 2004, Jeanne Miller had Shull sign a power-of-attorney document granting Miller the authority to act on her behalf.

Using that power of attorney, Jeanne Miller took \$25,000 from Shull's bank account and opened a joint checking and savings account in her and Shull's name.

In just a few months, court documents show, the account balance was \$5, and the money had been spent by the Millers and the Goffs.

The scheme also included:

- Removing about \$176,000 in U.S. savings bonds from Shull's safety-deposit boxes; \$50,000 in bonds were redeemed.
- Using Shull's credit cards to buy several items, including a \$4,000 computer system, a \$921 sheep dog - even a \$638 package of senior-year photographs for the Millers' son.
- Obtaining financing in Shull's name to purchase an \$18,000 van.

Jeanne Miller's attorney, Sharon Turek, said: "We've resolved the case pursuant to plea agreement and are awaiting sentencing." She declined to comment further.

Charles Miller's attorney could not be reached for comment.

Contact Kevin Grasha at 267-1347 or kgrasha@lsj.com.

Ministry helps reduce food bills

Thursday, July 06, 2006

By Ron Cammel
The Grand Rapids Press

SPARTA -- A new food ministry is helping more than 200 families with their groceries every month.

For \$25, anyone can get about \$70 worth of food through the Angel Food Ministry at Sparta Church of the Nazarene.

"I'd like to see a lot more people take advantage of this because of the financial situation in West Michigan," said program director Mary Stratton. "It's such a wonderful ministry."

Angel Food is a national organization based in Georgia. Food industry companies donate overruns, and the federal government grants money for food purchases.

The food, trucked across the country, is different every month. June's package included pork spareribs, hamburger, chicken, meatballs, potpies, potatoes, pasta, rice, beans, corn, pancake mix, peanut butter and eggs.

Stratton takes orders two weeks before distribution. The program started up in December with 44 orders. Last month, 213 orders came in.

"It's amazing the number of people we serve," Stratton said.

She said she hopes other agencies and churches pick up the ministry -- her church is now the area's only site -- to serve people closer to where they live.

Sparta Nazarene serves people from Sand Lake to Wayland and Muskegon to Rockford, all of whom have learned of it by word of mouth, she said.

They come to the church, 665 13 Mile Road NW, the fourth Saturday of every month, where more than a dozen volunteers distribute the food.

It's a long day for some.

Jerry and Ellen Mullen, along with four other volunteers, begin around 11 a.m. to pick up the food in Fremont while others set up the church gym. By 6 p.m., a long line of clients has formed and the production line begins as they slide their boxes down rows of tables.

"It's very busy and hectic when the door first opens," said Ellen Mullen. "It's kind of neat."

Members of the church's seniors class do most of the work. Teens carry boxes for the clients.

Mullen said she finishes cleanup about 8 p.m.

"It's just a way to reach out to people and help them," she said. "And a lot of people are very appreciative."

"It's work, but it's joyful work," said Stratton. "We want to be the hands and feet of Christ. Christ always met people's needs where they are."

Advocates for homeless push housing fund

Thursday, July 06, 2006

By Cedric Ricks

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Homeless activists pressed Kalamazoo County officials Wednesday night to support an affordable housing trust fund they say will boost housing opportunities for the area's poor.

Such a trust fund would create 1,000 housing units for people at 30 percent of the median income and below, said Mike Evans, director of the Michigan Homeless Action Network, a legal parent group of the Kalamazoo Homeless Action Network.

He told members of the Kalamazoo County Board of Commissioners it would go a long way toward advancing a 10-year plan to eliminate homelessness in Kalamazoo County.

About \$2 million annually would be needed to sustain the fund in Kalamazoo County, said Mary Brooks, director of the Housing Trust Fund Project for the Center for Community Change in Frazier Park, Calif.

Brooks suggested the county consider using funds generated from a real-estate transfer tax or fees that must be paid for recording documents with the county as possible revenue streams for the fund.

But County Administrator Don Gilmer said Brooks' suggestion for a revenue source won't work because the real-estate transfer tax funds K-12 education.

Gilmer also questioned whether counties have the authority to tax in this area. He said fees on recording documents are limited to paying for the cost of service and that only the Legislature can change that cap to raise extra revenue.

Brooks said the county can also look at using revenue collected on tax-delinquent properties as a way to fund a housing trust fund.

Affordable housing is important, but so are other priorities such as improving the county's jail and juvenile home and paying for more county deputies, said Joe Van Bruggen, a county commissioner who heard Brooks speak to the Kalamazoo County Public Housing Commission.

``There is no question there is a need for affordable housing," Van Bruggen said. ``The question is how do we fund it?"

About 50 people, many supporters of the Kalamazoo Homeless Action Network, attended Wednesday's county board meeting. Several speakers addressed the board while others held signs urging the board to help the area's homeless.

Anna Kay Smith, a Kalamazoo-area resident, said she has bad credit, a felony conviction and is unable to secure permanent housing.

“We need help really bad,” she said. “We have voices, we have feelings and we bleed red just like everybody else. We are not less than (anyone else) just because we are homeless.”

There are 400 affordable housing trust funds nationally, said Brooks, who was asked to come to Kalamazoo by the Michigan Organizing Project to talk with county leaders about housing trust funds.

“I think the most compelling reason that is pushing cities and counties and states to create housing trust funds is their recognition of how critical affordable housing is to the development of the community.”

211 director takes job in Florida

Thursday, July 06, 2006

By Susan J. Demas
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As Hurricane Rita barreled in on their mobile home, a hysterical Louisiana couple huddled in the bathtub with their 9-month-old and dialed Richard LaPratt.

They didn't know LaPratt was on the line, of course. They had only called the human services helpline he was overseeing after 911 couldn't help.

"They had a pillow over their head and were screaming for help," recalls LaPratt, Jackson County's 211 manager since 2002. "Twenty minutes into the call, the line went dead."

That was in September. The Lansing native was a long way from home, using his vacation to supervise 2,000 calls a night at the 211 center located in Monroe, La.

The story does have happy ending. Operators tracked down the shell-shocked family and helped them find ice and food.

Now LaPratt, 32, is ready to write the next chapter of his own story.

He's leaving his post July 24 for Orlando, Fla., where he'll head up a three-county 211 system that serves 2 million residents -- more than 12 times as many as in Jackson County.

"I saw the agency really put its nose to the grindstone in Louisiana," LaPratt said. "I realized I needed to get more experience in emergency planning."

LaPratt has done a "fantastic job" leading Jackson's 211 from its infancy in 2003 to fielding more than 35,000 calls, said Bethany Timmons, director of community impact for the United Way of Jackson County.

She expects a smooth transition, even as the hotline with a \$240,000 annual budget awaits state approval to expand into Hillsdale, Ingham, Eaton and Clinton counties by the end of 2006.

A new manager is expected to start in August at a salary between \$45,000 to \$50,000.

The decision is made by the 15-member 211 advisory board and LifeWays and United Way officials.

Illinois leads the Midwest in 'deep poverty,' report shows

7/5/2006, 10:49 a.m. ET

The Associated Press

CHICAGO (AP) — Illinois has about 724,000 residents living in what experts call "deep poverty," the highest rate in the Midwest, according to a recent report.

Deep poverty is defined as a family of four living on \$9,675 or less per year.

The number of people living in deep poverty has spiked in the six-county Chicagoland area since 2000, according to the U.S. Census, the 2004 Community Survey and the 2006 Report on Illinois Poverty by the bipartisan Heartland Alliance.

Though Illinois has the fifth-largest economy in the country, it also has the highest poverty rate in the Midwest. Those living in deep poverty account for 5.8 percent of the state's population, figures show, followed by 5.5 percent in Michigan and 4.6 percent in Ohio.

OAKLAND COUNTY

Unger's mom wants to see grandsons

She seeks order for regular visits before son loses his rights

July 6, 2006

BY L.L. BRASIER
FREE PRESS STAFF WRITER

The mother of Mark Unger, the Huntington Woods man convicted in June of killing his wife at a waterfront resort in northern Michigan, is hoping a family court judge will allow her to regularly visit her grandsons.

Bette Rosenthal, who lives in Florida, has filed suit in Oakland County Circuit Court asking that she be allowed, under Michigan's Grandparents Rights Act, to visit regularly with her grandsons, Max, 12, and Tyler, 9.

Mark Unger was convicted of killing the boys' mother, Florence Unger, in 2003 by throwing her off a deck, then putting her in Lower Herring Lake in Benzie County. The boys have been living with Florence Unger's parents, Harold and Claire Stern of Huntington Woods, for more than a year.

The Sterns are expected to seek adoption of the boys once Mark Unger's parental rights are terminated. He will be sentenced to life in prison July 18, and the Oakland County Prosecutor's Office will ask a judge to end Unger's rights to his sons in a hearing tentatively set for August.

But Unger is expected to appeal his conviction and will ask the court to delay ending his parental rights during the appeal.

Generally, under Michigan law, grandparents can seek visitation of their grandchildren if they can show that ending the relationship will cause a "substantial risk of emotional, mental or physical harm."

But Rosenthal's case is not so clear because, also under Michigan law, once Unger's rights are terminated, Rosenthal has no legal standing to seek visitation with the boys. But her attorneys are hoping to convince Oakland County Family Court Judge Linda Hallmark, in a hearing set for July 12, to order visitation for Rosenthal before Unger loses his rights to his sons.

And they are hoping such an order would stand, even after the adoption takes place.

"Mrs. Rosenthal has been very actively involved in her two grandchildren, taking them to sports and activities. They would travel for weeks at a time," said Bloomfield Hills attorney Dan Victor.

"These children have a very serious bond with their grandmother."

Victor said Florence Unger's family has allowed Rosenthal to see her grandsons on "a very limited basis" since Mark Unger's arrest and conviction.

Victor said she is seeking a regular visitation schedule but recognizes that because she lives in another state, "it's not going to be an every-other-weekend kind of thing."

Victor said that contrary to published reports, none of Mark Unger's family plans to fight for custody or to adopt the boys. "We just want her to be able to continue her relationship with them," he said of Rosenthal.

The Oakland County Prosecutor's Office is named as a defendant in Rosenthal's suit.

Assistant Prosecutor Keri Middleditch said Rosenthal had been allowed to visit her grandsons and that she was surprised by the lawsuit.

"She's always had visitation," Middleditch said. "All she has to do is call and ask."

Contact L.L. BRASIER at 248-858-2262 or brasier@freepress.com.

Larry Hawkins Lansing, MI

Larry Hawkins Lansing, MI Died peacefully June 29, 2006 in Lansing, MI; he was born in Detroit 63 years ago. An employee of the State of Michigan for 35 years, he was instrumental in implementing social programs that improved countless lives across the state. A vivacious man with a spirit of compassion and admiration for everyone who was fortunate to cross his path, Larry made friends around the world. Never a weary traveler was he; from Paris, Kentucky to Paris, France and places all in between, he loved learning local lore and discovering the best places to dine. Erudite in history, politics, art and culture, he broadened the horizons of so many. An avid cyclist, marathon runner (Bay-to Breakers 12 times), film buff, gourmet, cross-country skier, the best camper ever, voracious reader, lifelong democrat of the most progressive kind, a rare brilliant wit, and last but not least, an amazing loving father who never said "should". He would want the good that is in us all, even in the worst of us, to flower and grow. *Sic transit Gloria mundi.* **In honor of Larry, his children, Nathaniel, Anna, and Jennifer are hosting a Memorial service on Saturday, July 8, 11:00 a.m. at the Gorsline-Runciman Funeral Homes, 1730 E. Grand River Avenue, East Lansing.** The memorial will be followed by a celebration of Larry's life at Beggar's Banquet, 218 Abbott Road, East Lansing. In lieu of flowers, the family requests donations be made in Larry's name to the National Public Radio at NPR Foundation, 635 Massachusetts Ave. NW, Washington, DC 20001-3753.

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